

In fact, on July 5 the Washington Post ran an article entitled, "Senate Panel Faults Missile Defense Plan." In the article, the Post states:

Democrats in Congress are building a legislative roadblock for the Bush administration's plan to place elements of a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic.

It is an incorrect perception. It undermines our alliance relationships by causing our allies to think we are not committed in a serious way to building a missile defense system that would be effective against Iranian attacks and be protective of Europe. So I think it is therefore incumbent upon us to clarify the Senate's stance.

The Poles and the Czechs and other NATO allies have all undertaken the momentous challenge of winning over their populations to the idea of American missile defenses in Europe. They have battled anti-Americanism, pressure from Europe and Russia, because they value our friendship, but more importantly because they realize Europe may soon be vulnerable to Iranian nuclear intimidation and potential nuclear attack unless steps are taken to develop defenses now.

I think it would be a slap in the face and unbecoming to our Nation if we were to pull the rug out from under these projects after our allies have stepped up and been supportive of them. We cannot stand idly by, my colleagues, when a madman threatens to destroy the United States and to wipe from the map allies of the United States, then defies the international community by developing the means to carry out these threats.

We are the most powerful military in the world, but some people doubt our seriousness and our commitment. In the Middle East, in particular, this perception of weakness can be a fatal error. So I think it is appropriate for us to make clear to Iran and to Russia and to our allies worldwide that we understand that the Iranian danger is clear and present.

We must leave no uncertainty in anyone's mind that we intend to defend ourselves and our allies from this threat. Our security, the security of our allies, and the credibility of our commitments are all at stake. I will just add that while the Iranian actions are very troubling, they should be taken very seriously. Iran's words cannot be ignored.

I would say one thing further. We have no reason to be intimidated by Iran. We have the capability of defending ourselves, our military, and our interests, and the leaders in Iran need to know this. This Senator is prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to defend our national interests.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, with regard to the Sessions amendment, it would establish a U.S. policy concerning defense against Ira-

nian ballistic missiles stating that the United States will develop and deploy effectively defenses against Iranian ballistic missiles as soon as technologically possible.

I think everyone agrees with that idea. I would suggest that this is effectively our policy today, and, indeed, is the policy of the bill and is so stated in the bill before us, that we are already developing and deploying a number of missile defense programs to provide such effective defenses.

For example, the United States has already deployed the Patriot PAC-3 system to the region to provide defensive capability for our forward-deployed forces in the region. We are also developing and deploying the AEGIS BMD system, and we are developing the THAAD system. All of these systems will provide effective defense capability against Iran's existing and near-term missile capabilities.

However, we do not have sufficient capability today with these systems to provide the level of protection that our combatant commanders need. Our senior military commanders readily acknowledge that fact, including the combatant commander of the U.S. Strategic Command, General Cartwright. He is responsible for global integrated missile defense. He readily acknowledges that fact.

For that reason, the bill before the Senate authorizes an additional \$315 million to increase or accelerate these three crucial near-term missile defense programs. And what they do is to provide increased protection for our forward-deployed forces, our allies, and our friends in the region.

In other words, we are already putting this policy in effect. That is the true measure of our determination to provide effective defenses against Iran's ballistic missiles.

Now, I understand the Republican leader wants to make a statement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, would the Senator yield 1 minute for my response?

I thank Senator NELSON for his comments. I agree with him that, properly read, our legislation does what he says. But I even had a military person think that perhaps we had done something to weaken our commitment. I think others, such as the Washington Post, may have overinterpreted some of the things that are in that language. I believe this would be a good way to clarify our policy. I thank him for his leadership.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, before I speak on the amendment concerning the withdrawal from Iraq offered by Senator LEVIN, I would like to make a few comments about the benchmarks report required by the supplemental bill that was signed in May and released by the President just this morning.

We knew when the Senate passed the conference report that according to the legislation we were requiring a benchmark report in July and a benchmark report in September. Why were these dates important? First, we knew that July was important because the Baghdad security plan is now fully manned, something that was achieved less than 1 month ago.

Congress wanted to send a clear signal to the Iraqi Government that full cooperation and sacrifice in executing the Baghdad security plan was imperative and that the hard work of political compromise must begin. We have done that.

Second, General Petraeus informed the Senate that he and Ambassador Crocker would provide an assessment of the counterinsurgency plan to the President, as we all know, in September. Having heard that, the Senate thought it reasonable that we would be provided the same assessment and that we could form a reasoned legislative response to that report.

What have we learned? We have learned that progress is mixed, that many of our military tasks assigned to the military have been achieved, and that we have not seen sufficient progress on the political benchmarks. The Congress decided in May that 1 month of a fully manned surge was an insufficient period to call the Petraeus plan a success or a failure. Certainly, the young soldiers and marines risking their lives today on the streets of Baghdad and Ramadi would agree, and they deserve our patience.

Some of our colleagues have quite reasonably refrained from drafting new amendments that would revisit the actions taken by this Senate back in May until they have at least reviewed the benchmarks report delivered just today.

I would encourage my colleagues to review the report, as I intend to, and to hear what General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker have to say in September. There is much at stake and, frankly, they deserve to be heard.

AMENDMENT NO. 2087

Now on another matter, Mr. President, the Senate will soon take up the Levin amendment. But before we do, I think it is important that we take a look at what it says.

The Levin amendment says:

The Secretary of Defense shall commence the reduction of the number of United States forces in Iraq not later than 120 days after the date of enactment of the enactment of this Act.

Now, exactly what would this reduction involve—10,000 troops, 20,000, 50,000, all of them? Can we at least get maybe a ballpark figure? The Levin amendment does not quite give us one. It only says U.S. forces will have a "limited presence" after this reduction. What is a "limited presence"?

Does it mean limiting our presence in Al Anbar, which everyone agrees has been a stunning success in our fight against al-Qaida? Does it mean limiting our presence in Baghdad? In the